

Pakistan Visit

Begum Zia goes to Pakistan today on the last leg of her itinerary for South Asia as the Chairperson of SAARC. She will share the experiences of her recent visits to Maldives, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka with her Pakistani counterpart Benazir Bhutto who in turn is expected to enlighten Begum Zia. In some detail, on her visit to the US.

The Bangladesh PM's sojourn in Islamabad will be extremely brief allowing for only pointed discussion on carefully selected subjects. SAPTA which is now pretty close to the heart of the Pakistan government will receive focused attention at the highest level because this is waiting to be finalised for launching by January 1996. Private sectors of Bangladesh and Pakistan will be able to cooperate better within the framework of SAPTA.

It augurs well that the joint economic commission will be dynamised. At its initiative two accords are likely to be signed — one on trade and the other on agricultural cooperation. The exchange of private sector delegations between the two countries has done some spadework in terms of market exploration and future investment. Now some tangible outcome is awaited along these lines.

Pakistan is a major buyer of our raw jute, jute goods and tea while Bangladesh has been importing Pakistani cotton, cloth material and wheat in large quantities. The trade balance is tilted towards Pakistan but this can be improved to a point of equalisation with a greater exploitation of Bangladesh's market in the reverse — for import purposes, that is.

While welcoming the prospects for expanded economic relations between Dhaka and Islamabad, we cannot help point out that the issues regarding repatriation of well over one lakh Pakistanis stranded in Bangladesh, to the country of their natural choice, and division of assets of undivided Pakistan have stalked our otherwise normal relations for the last more than two decades. This is unfortunate. Begum Zia is widely expected here to persuade her counterpart in Islamabad to re-start the repatriation process in fulfilment of the agreement with Nawaz Sharif government under which a few hundred did actually return to Pakistan. Since the Saudi government remains ready to finance the process there should not be any more stalling of this. The assets issue is a complex one requiring patent handling but here is a pressing humanitarian concern for the stranded Pakistanis that cannot wait to be addressed.

Saving Wildlife

That Bangladesh has become poorer by 17 species of wildlife strikes as no revelation. It merely confirms a long-held fear. And it is small relief that a programme for reintroduction of some of them and their close kinds from other countries has been adopted. While we attach due importance to this effort, we hold it more important to save another 136 species said to be on the verge of extinction. A workshop on 'CITES Implementation in Bangladesh' being held in the city has understandably taken up the issue to find out how best this problem of bio-diversity can be addressed.

The Convention for International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) is an effective means to limit — if not totally stop — the illegal hunting and poaching of endangered animals and birds. As a member of the CITES, Bangladesh naturally can benefit immensely from the various provisions of the convention. But not until they are implemented with seriousness and a sense of urgency. Indiscriminate destruction of forests and killing of wild animals still continue here with hardly any authority to prevent the acts. Not only a naturally increasing demand on more land for both agriculture and housing has reduced the habitats of different species but a reckless competition for commercial logging and senseless use of chemical fertilizer and pesticide has made the environment hostile to most of the fauna.

So here is case for bio-diversity that has to be looked at in its totality. A natural balance is what is really maintained by the plant life vis-a-vis the animal life. In nature almost nothing is superfluous. The frogs whose legs end up as tasty dishes on the dining tables in European countries are known to eat insects every day three times their body weight. Anybody can see how they serve the farmers. Similar principles follow almost everywhere in the order of nature. At the top of all this is man. So if the other species are drastically reduced, man's existence on the planet is also proportionately threatened. Let us therefore grow in the knowledge that our existence depends on the survival of other species.

A Heart's Claim

Dispute over pet animals and birds can lead to bloody feuds. But where the owners, or better say masters, are not unduly temperamental and rely more on their legal system than the dictates of their hearts — which can at times be blind — the cases are settled at the court. In Australia two families claimed their custodial right to a cockatoo but the bird actually had the final say in resolving the dispute. A cockatoo can pick up a few words and so did this one. When the case went to court, the judge pronounced the verdict on the basis of the vocabulary the bird had learnt to speak at its former owners' house.

The bird had gone missing from its original home two years back and found a new owner. The latter also taught it a few words but the names of the former owner's grandson actually decided the case. After two years the bird did not show any special allegiance to either of the two claimants. But sometimes animals like dog themselves remember their former masters and without the ability to speak can prove who their master is.

However, it is not just animals alone that are claimed by two or more parties, sometimes babies and children are at the centre of disputes. For example, the story in which two women claim to be the mother of a baby and go to the judge for settling the dispute gives the best possible moral. The judge asks the court executioner to cut the baby in two halves and give each of the women one half. At this, one of the women implores to the judge that she would rather not ask for her share and the baby be allowed to live with the other woman. Everyone knew who the baby's real mother was.

BANGLADESH Prime Ministers brief visit to Pakistan which gets underway today may not have any fixed agenda before it. Nevertheless, we can assume in generalities that Begum Zia and Ms. Bhutto will have some important notes to exchange on wide ranging matters following Pakistan PM's 11-day trip to the USA, longest since Liaqat Ali's in 1950, and Bangladesh PM's visits to Maldives, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka as the SAARC chairperson.

Since Begum Zia's visit to Islamabad is within the SAARC framework, her talks with Ms Bhutto will include a focused reference to SAPTA in view of an expected decision at the New Delhi Summit to formally launch it by January 1996 as envisioned in the Dhaka Declaration of April 1993. The Bangladesh Prime Minister will almost certainly try to prevail upon Ms Bhutto to the importance of her participation in the Delhi Summit which she wants attended by Pakistan President Leghari apparently in a huff over soured India-Pak relations centred on Kashmir.

The prevalent view in India seems to be that the Prime Minister of Pakistan may not have come empty-handed from her odyssey to the USA. Although much of India's concern over a US review of the Pressler amendment and a possible delivery of F-16 jet fighters to Pakistan sounds be-

KHALEDA Zia's visit to Pakistan as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh is a matter of great importance. Stepping out of the shadows of her late husband, the former President of Bangladesh, Begum Zia's role has not lived upto the initial promise of the first six months. Racked both by natural and man-made disasters, Bangladesh is beginning to skirt around Kissinger's "international basket case" epithet. The Bangladesh electorate were sophisticated enough to discern qualities in the lady that escaped more experienced analysts; today we are wiser that it is not the legacy alone of her late husband, but her own personality and leadership acumen that has elevated her to being in her own right. Talks between the two MPs would probably focus around issues of mutual interest but Begum Zia will have to raise, if only for the benefit of satisfying political opponents back home, the unpalatable question of division of assets pre-1971. Pakistan's reply will be obvious one about sharing the debt burden. One hopes there will be no bitterness in quickly putting these questions into permanent limbo and getting on with more substantive issues that will be of mutual benefit to both the nations.

The most lasting relationship between any two entities is always economic, that is the thread of a binding fabric. We must therefore look to positive features in our trade that adds the accruing benefits of cooperation, searching for innovative ways and means to force-multiply them. At the same time, both the economies, considered complementary till 1971, are going through similar changes of liberalisation. Pakistan has been playing catch-up for the past few years with Bangladesh which had started the process of shedding off the yoke of nationalisation almost a decade earlier. The two countries are at an interesting economic crossroads, they can opt for a mutually pragmatic discourse or pass each other like ships in the night relying on rhetoric rather than reality to keep the trade flow going.

Among the things that Bangladesh can purchase and Pakistan can export freely are

PM's Pakistan Visit
Short on Time Long on Agenda

Bangladesh should enjoy a good deal of acceptability both in Pakistan and India to be able to request the two countries to roll back their arms race and lead the way in the SAARC region for a diversion of the blocked resources to the cause of the welfare of one-fifth of the global population inhabiting South Asia.

ing still quite premature and anticipatory. The Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee has minced no words to threaten — obliquely the US, it seems — with "counter-strategy" if the US freeze on the sale of F-16s to Pakistan is waived. Indian strategist Jagjit Singh surmised in a television interview the other day that perhaps the US was thinking of Gulf security when softening up to Pakistan on the freeze issue.

However, very few keen observers of the regional scene could have failed to take note of Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's recent high-profile visit to India. In his address to the Indian parliament, the Iranian leader in toto made two points: first, he wanted the foreign warships to pull out of the Indian Ocean and the Gulf; and second, he urged India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, despite their religious divergences, to cooperate to provide stability in South Asia.

The US has been critical of

Iran's nuclear deals with Russia and China, so that Washington could not have taken kindly to Rafsanjani's visit to India. Narasimha Rao clearly ignored the US reservations about Iran apparently to make his point with Washington over the latest development in US-

blocked resources to the cause of the welfare of one-fifth of the global population inhabiting South Asia.

Begum Zia has raised the Farakka issue in one form or another highlighting Bangladesh's terrible plight over the unilateral withdrawal of the

get back to Bangladesh government with specific Indian formulae on short-and long-term sharing of the Ganges water. Begum Zia will have the opportunity in Delhi to ask for an Indian redemption on that pledge.

Will the Pakistan leader mention Kashmir to the Bangladesh Prime Minister by way of seeking the latter's support for her stance on the issue? Many here believe that the Kashmir conflict breeds tension in the region and that India and Pakistan ought to resolve it by recourse to all the existing resolutions on the subject.

Begum Zia's visit is expected to give a fresh dimension to the perception, realities and prospects of Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan. The stalled repatriation of nearly one and a half lakh Pakistanis who have been stranded in Bangladesh for the last twentyfour years is sure to feature in the talks. The ball is in Pakistan's court because an agreement with the previous



Time and Tide
Shah Husain Imam

Pakistan relations. For the records, Moscow and Beijing have defended their positions on the nuclear deals with Tehran saying they were keeping 'within the NPT regulations'.

Bangladesh should enjoy a good deal of acceptability both in Pakistan and India to be able to request the two countries to roll back their arms race and lead the way in the SAARC region for a diversion of the

Ganges water upstream at the different SAARC capitals she visited lately. Whether she would do that in Pakistan is to be seen because she must be kept over her talks with Narasimha Rao on the question in a few days' time in a bilateral retreat from the New Delhi SAARC Summit. The Indian Prime Minister had promised as far back as during the 1993 SAARC summit in Dhaka that he would quickly

A View from Pakistan

Begum Zia's Visit: The Economic Equation

The most lasting relationship between any two entities is always economic, that is the thread of a binding fabric. We must therefore look to positive features in our trade that adds the accruing benefits of cooperation, searching for innovative ways and means to force-multiply them.

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

raw cotton, cotton yarn, finished and unfinished textiles. From time to time, Bangladesh also needs rice and urea fertilizer (when it is not exporting the same). Bangladesh remains in short supply of cement, sometimes surplus in Pakistan, and can take in more cement plants, sugar plants, textile machinery, etc. In short, Pakistan can easily export to Bangladesh between US \$150-200 million worth of goods and commodities.

Among the things Bangladesh can sell to Pakistan are raw jute, jute goods and tea. There are sixteen jute mills in Pakistan, the third largest jute industry in the world, all relying on imported raw jute from Bangladesh worth approximately US\$15 million. Cumulatively they produce enough jute goods. Sid B Twill gunny bags and Hessian bags, to almost meet all the jute goods demands of the country.

By giving protection to the domestic jute industry, Government of Pakistan (GoP) manages the unique feat of defrauding itself in the process by contributing to the "golden fleece" of the exchequer, losing almost Rs 1-2 billion annually. On the first count it loses on the customs and excise duties that it would have imposed and on the second count, the local mills sell at the much higher "market" price thus artificially created.

This is one of the greatest scams on this earth but since everyone seems to be in on the loot of public funds — politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen alike — it is conveniently ignored. While not disturbing the on-going scam from happening, one could conceivably allow a leeway for expansion of trade. The re-export requirements of the Rice Export Corporation of Pakistan, which makes up only 12-15% of Pakistan's total demand of jute goods, making an import bill of about US\$ 15-18

million annually would suffice. This does not really create a dent in the supply of local jute mills but sets up a gross difference in prices that the perpetrators of the scam would like to avoid.

The third and last item is tea, consumed in large quantities in Pakistan. Pre-1971, the former East Pakistan had almost a 100% monopoly over the tea imports by the former West Pakistan. Today, the monopoly of Lever Brothers (through its two companies Brook Bond and Lipton) has ensured that the cheap Bangladeshi tea, which, complemented by the flavours provided by Sri Lankan tea in much smaller percentage, was used as the major stocks, has been replaced by expensive Kenyan tea from gardens in Kenya owned by Lever Brothers and their commercial associates.

In a gradual process, the complete taste of the Pakistani palate has been changed and it will be difficult to wean away the population which is a hostage of a drug-like addiction for the superior and expensive Kenyan tea. What Kenya buys in return from Pakistan for sales of US \$100-150 million or so we should not lose any sleep over, it is next to nothing, even less than US\$1 million. In free market conditions, Bangladesh exports tea to Pakistan worth only about US\$10-12 million annually.

So we have a situation where Pakistan can export about US\$200 million worth of goods and commodities to Bangladesh but Bangladesh can only export at best US\$50 million to Pakistan; this is a tremendous imbalance. Rather than putting the ball only in Bangladesh's court to increase exports to Pakistan, we must look to steps that both Pakistan and Bangladesh can take to ensure that (1) Pakistan

sells goods and commodities worth at least US\$ 100 million to Bangladesh, (2) picks up at least US\$50 million from Bangladesh and (3) finds third countries or Multi-nationals (MNCs) to pick up the balance trade obligations of US\$50 million from Bangladesh.

The main importer of raw cotton in Bangladesh is the Bangladesh Textile Mills Corporation (BTMC) under the Ministry of Textiles. The Bangladesh Ministries of Textile and Commerce should allocate at least US\$70 million worth of raw cotton from Pakistan. Similarly the Bangladesh Ministry of Food could possibly import 1000000-1500000 tons of Iri-6 or Sindh Joshi parboiled rice from RECP. The Bangladesh Ministry of Industries could earmark sugar plants for import from Pakistan.

Since raw material for cement like limestone and gypsum is not available in Bangladesh, a factory producing cement clinkers could be put up in proximity of any of the ports in Pakistan and the clinkers transported to Bangladesh in bulk, being crushed and bagged in poly-lined jute bags there.

The private sector is already exporting large quantities of cotton yarn and textiles to Bangladesh which are converted into finished goods and then re-exported. This could be streamlined but a firm mandate must be given that it should be result-oriented and closely monitored.

Like cotton yarn and textiles, raw jute finds its way naturally from Bangladesh to the local Pakistani jute mills and needs no force-feeding. To an extent Bangladeshi tea has also a market, the problem is that in the face of the superior quality (and expensive) Kenyan tea, its natural marketability has declined considerably. In the late 70s, early 80s, the

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Of constitutional amendments

Sir, If and when the constitution needs to be amended, my proposals along with, perhaps, other proposals are that it has to be amended in some essential respects. My suggestions for specific amendments are as follows.

The women members of the Parliament (Jatiya Sangsad) must be elected through direct elections and not through indirect election as at present.

The President should have the power to dissolve Parliament and/or the Cabinet in his official capacity and to ask the leaders of the majority party to form a new government at times of political crisis.

No non-elected person shall be selected as a minister of the Cabinet, of any category.

It can be visualized that persons of eminence in the appropriate fields may have to be appointed to assist the Cabinet. This is quite justifi-

able, that such eminent persons shall act as advisers, irrespective of their political affiliations, and their status should be equivalent to that of a Cabinet minister. Once they are appointed, they would be expected to act as impartial advisers in the national interests and their number should be strictly limited, as the size of the Cabinet itself should be reasonably limited. This mechanism will reduce both incompetence and corruption.

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NGO's have no accountability

Sir, Recently the Development page of The Daily Star has been excellent reading. I refer to the articles published regarding NGOs on the 10th and 17th of April. Here I would like to extend my congratulations to Nina Chowdhury, who

has taken a positive step by writing the very interesting, informative and relevant articles on NGOs operating in Bangladesh today.

As the executive director of an NGO myself, I quite agree with her that the NGOs do not have any accountability or transparency, which are essential in order to ensure that NGOs function in the proper manner. We are constantly reading in the papers where the government has failed, but we never seem to read anything remotely critical about NGOs, and certainly not in the English language newspapers.

I hope this brave lady will continue investigating and writing about us and our failures so that we have scope for improving ourselves, and successfully serving the people that our organisations were set up to do. After all, that is, or should be, our main aim.

I also congratulate the Editor of The Daily Star for following the development page to take on an exciting new direction, which has vastly improved the quality of material published, and of course, the person who selects the articles to be published. Keep up the good work!

Prof Rokeya Rahman Kabeer
Executive Director
Saptagram Narit Suvarinvar
Parishad, Dhaka

A Tourist's Reaction

Sir, I had an opportunity to read the opinion (A Tourist's Reaction) of Mr A Husain published in your daily on the 13th instant. It is nothing but a true picture of every sector of our country. Now the question is how to get rid of these miseries.

It is said that our educated bureaucrats are mainly responsible for all these evils. Because, political leaders are very temporary in the realm. So these Secretaries of Ministries also should be held responsible when there are foul activities and not only the ministers and there must be punishment so that in future none can dare to go by fault.

The opposition leaders seem to have no real picture before them. The past, present and future remain static. So, like in power sector, we should invite private parties (including joint venture) for other infrastructures like transport, communications, roads, railway, health, sanitation, industry and even development of human resources. The sooner we do this the better we get the benefit. Of course vested interest will hinder this plan. So, we must remain patriotic vigilants.

M Ali
Kadernanj, Rajshahi

government for their repatriation in three phases is there to be pressed by Bangladesh for implementation by the Pakistani present government. Only some 373 returned to Pakistan after that agreement with Nawaz Sharif in 1992. Saudi money remains committed to the process of repatriation and housing colonies have been built for them, too. The ethnic violence could put a premium on Ms Bhutto's political skill to absorb them but given her growing charisma and international standing that should hardly be a tall order. Besides, what is over-riding here is the humanitarian or moral consideration which the stranded Pakistanis deserve in full measure. The unofficial pointer to the so-called illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in Pakistan cannot over-ride or dilute an inter-state agreement on the Pakistanis stranded here. On the complex issue of the division of assets a fresh start is very much awaited.

It is understood that two accords are likely to be signed under the auspices of the Joint Economic Commission, one relating to investment and the other having to do with agricultural cooperation. The private sectors of Pakistan and Bangladesh can take full advantage of SAPTA to build better ties between them in the near future.

The regular column 'Along My Way' by S B Chaudhuri will be published tomorrow.

While Bangladesh certainly has more raw jute, jute goods and tea, Pakistan's upper limit for demand of Bangladeshi goods and commodities cannot be more than US\$50 million. To have an equitable trade agreement for exchange of goods and commodities either way, a WHITE KNIGHT in the form of a trading company or a Multi-national (MNC), as stated earlier, will have to be found to take the balance of US\$50 million from Bangladesh. To enable this, the Government of Pakistan will have to pay a fee ranging from 6-8% of FOB value of the Countertrade obligations. Pakistan benefits because it gets to export an additional US\$50 million or so to Bangladesh, Bangladesh also benefits by the additional off trade of US\$50 million as well as the steadying of the original US\$50 million exports to Pakistan, presently going down every year. The two political governments must put their authority behind jump-starting the trade between the two countries and force-multiplying it thereof. A heavy responsibility therefore rests on both the PMs, whether they can shrug off the political irritants as well as the baggage of history and shoulder that responsibility will be seen in their pragmatic approach to revitalizing trade and commerce between the two countries.

The writer, an industrialist and eminent columnist with The Nation, Lahore also contributes regularly to The Daily Star.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

A Big Mistake

THE Paradise Valley Veterans of Vietnam were holding their Friday-night cookout when Yarmouth yelled, "Hey, did you hear the news? Bob McNamara said that our war was a big mistake."

Eldridge retorted, "Now he tells us." "He was one of the best and the brightest, so it took him a little longer than most people to figure it out," said Dartmouth.

Climberg said, "When McNamara was Secretary of Defense I was just a corporal at Tet, but I told everyone before he did that we couldn't win the war."

"Why didn't you tell him?" "I tried to, but my CO warned me that if I sent McNamara so much as a post card he would have me swinging from an Army scaffold."

"Apparently McNamara didn't speak out because he believed that once you've served an American President in a high position, and you blew it, you owed it to the country to keep your mouth shut — even if he's wrong."

Farhart said, "I'm not going to buy the book. I'll have to take the money out of my veterans disability check, and I don't see why I should do that when all McNamara says is that we shouldn't have been in Indochina in the first place."

Sullivan joined in, "I used to do body counts for Gen. Westmoreland. During the war I asked one of his aides, 'Is this just a make-work project for the Pentagon and the White House?' He replied, 'GI body-counters have the most important role in the war. The more Vietnamese we can say we killed, the more Vietnam protesters we can arrest back home.'"

"McNamara was a big believer in body counts when he was Secretary of Defense, but he stopped counting when he left his job. He never said anything to anybody because he didn't want to ruin their day."

Eldridge said, "Even if he's a little late, I think a mea culpa is good for a person's soul. Not only is it good for McNamara, it is good for the country, and it's good for the book business. People like to read about men once in power who are willing to admit publicly that they messed up a war. Besides, everyone had forgotten Vietnam, but now it's back — bigger than ever. McNamara wasn't into drugs and he wasn't into booze, but he sure got high on hubris."

Climberg said, "I have an idea. Let's give McNamara a book party. It would show that we have no hard feelings about all the failures of our leaders."

"Good idea," agreed Dartmouth. "Paradise Valley Vets of Vietnam don't hold grudges. We all made mistakes during the war, and just because McNamara made a biggie doesn't mean that we don't respect his judgement."

"I'd follow him anywhere," said Farhart. "Too had Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon aren't alive. They could tell us how they both lost the war as well."

"Henry Kissinger is still alive." "Kissinger would never admit to making a mistake over Vietnam. That's what makes him Kissinger." "By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB."